

Guardian newspaper condemned for publishing “deliberate lies” about Julian Assange

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On September 21, the *Guardian* newspaper published claims, based on unnamed sources, that Ecuador, Russia and WikiLeaks had conspired to smuggle Julian Assange out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London and transport him to “another country”—most likely Russia.

According to the article, the plan was set for Christmas Eve 2017. Ecuador had granted Assange “diplomatic” status to represent its government in Russia. He was to be picked up by consular vehicles. However, the supposed plot was abandoned as “too risky,” because British authorities outright rejected any recognition of diplomatic status for Assange and vowed to arrest him as soon as he set foot outside the embassy.

The claims were immediately rejected as false by Russian officials and former British whistleblower and WikiLeaks’ supporter Craig Murray.

A representative of the Russian embassy stated in a letter to the *Guardian* that the article had “nothing to do with reality.” The letter declared that it was “puzzled by the sensationalist attitude of the authors.”

Craig Murray publicly stated that he had been involved in earlier talks with Ecuadorian consul Fidel Narvaez over possible “future destinations” for Assange. Russia, he insisted, was specifically ruled out as “undesirable.”

Assange was granted Ecuadorian citizenship in early December 2017 as part of considerations as to whether holding that status could assist in getting him out of the embassy. British authorities left no doubt that it would not.

On March 28, 2018, under intense pressure from Washington and London, the Ecuadorian embassy cut off Assange’s ability to communicate with the outside world or even receive personal visitors, in a vindictive

effort to force him to leave the building.

Murray linked the *Guardian*’s allegations directly to the Mueller investigation in the United States. The investigation appears to be trying to construct a case that WikiLeaks and Assange “conspired” with Russian intelligence during the 2016 presidential election to hack the Democratic National Committee and publish emails that impacted on the campaign of Hillary Clinton.

The authors of the *Guardian* article are Stephanie Kirchgaessner, Dan Collins and Luke Harding. For more than seven years, Harding, in particular, has used the pages of the newspaper to seek to discredit Julian Assange and undermine support for WikiLeaks.

The *Guardian* article alleges: “The involvement of Russian officials in hatching what was described as the ‘basic’ plan raises new questions about Assange’s ties to the Kremlin. The WikiLeaks editor is a key figure in the ongoing US criminal investigation into Russia’s attempts to sway the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.”

Assange cannot speak for himself to answer such assertions, as Ecuador has denied him his right to communicate for close to six months.

Craig Murray, however, wrote: “It is very serious indeed when a newspaper like the *Guardian* prints a tissue of deliberate lies in order to spread fake news on behalf of the security services. I cannot find words eloquent enough to express the depth of my contempt for Harding and Katharine Viner [*Guardian* editor-in-chief], who have betrayed completely the values of journalism.

“The aim of the piece is evidently to add a further layer to the fake news of WikiLeaks’ (non-existent)

relationship to Russia as part of the ‘Hillary didn’t really lose’ narrative. I am, frankly, rather shocked.”

The sole objective of the efforts to associate WikiLeaks with Russia and the Trump campaign is to legitimise the unsubstantiated accusations of “Russian meddling” by the Democratic Party and US intelligence agencies. The allegations have no credibility.

The DNC emails were published by WikiLeaks on July 22, 2016. They exposed that the Clinton camp had sought to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the primary elections. As a result, top DNC officials were forced to resign in disgrace over their attempt to manipulate the outcome. Later, in October 2016, WikiLeaks also published emails leaked from Clinton campaign director John Podesta, which shed further light on the right-wing, militarist character of her policies and campaign.

WikiLeaks has flatly denied that it obtained the DNC and Podesta leaks from purported “Russian” sources. Craig Murray has publicly stated that he knows the emails came from “disgruntled” employees within the DNC who were disgusted by the anti-democratic attempt to undermine Sanders and benefit Clinton.

The claim that Assange coordinated with Roger Stone, a figure who by that time was only loosely associated with the Trump campaign, is even more absurd. Stone did not even attempt to establish contact with WikiLeaks until *after* the publication of the DNC leaks and it was already in possession of the Podesta emails. Apart from a few business-like exchanges, there is no record of any collaboration between Stone and WikiLeaks.

The effort to paint Assange as a Russian tool is nevertheless relentless. On September 18, Associated Press published a letter by Assange dated November 30, 2010, authorising an individual, Israel Shamir, to act on his behalf in seeking to get a visa to go to Russia. AP asserts that the letter was an “early hint of Assange’s budding relationship with Moscow” which “would become increasingly salient before the 2016 presidential election.”

In fact, the letter serves only to underscore the immense peril that faced Assange in late 2010. Politicians and media figures in the US were publicly calling for him to be murdered over WikiLeaks’ publication of information exposing American war crimes and diplomatic intrigues. A Swedish prosecutor

was pursuing manufactured allegations that he had possibly committed sexual assault. The government of Australia, where Assange is a citizen, was refusing to provide him with any assistance.

For Assange to consider leaving Britain for Russia, or any another country that was less likely to collaborate with a politically-motivated extradition request, was entirely rational. As it was, Sweden blocked that possibility by successfully issuing an Interpol Red Alert for Assange’s arrest on the same day, November 30, 2010.

Within days, Assange had handed himself in to British police, beginning the protracted 18-month legal battle against extradition to Sweden from where he could have been rapidly dispatched to the US to face espionage charges. The legal campaign culminated with his request for political asylum in the small Ecuadorian embassy in June 2012.

Speaking last week at the World Ethical Data Forum, Assange’s legal representative Jennifer Robinson stated: “We have used every legal avenue available to us, in the UK and at the UN, to challenge this situation. This is and has always been about the risk of US extradition. This case could be resolved tomorrow if the UK would give this assurance.”

Instead, all indications suggest the British, Australian and Ecuadorian governments are collaborating to have Assange indicted and extradited to the US to appear as part of the Mueller investigation.



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